

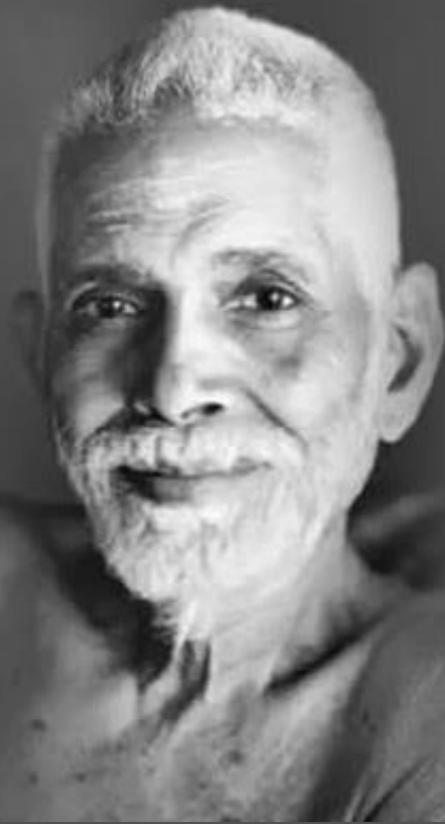


Direct Path

RAMANA KENDRA DELHI

Vol. XXV, No. 4

November 2023 - January 2024



77. Om atmavate namah

Ever-composed and Self-possessed.

78. Om sarvavani matasthanam aradhyaya namah

One adored by the followers of all religions in the whole world.

79. Om sarvasadgunine namah

Possessor of all good qualities.



Direct Path

VOLUME XXV, ISSUE 4

NOVEMBER 2023 - JANUARY 2024

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

As the journal depends on articles from volunteer writers, we appeal to you to send in articles for our consideration. We wish to keep the range of subjects both wide and diverse covering aspects such as: Bhagavan's life, teachings, and experiences related to the practice of his methods; life, teachings, and experiences related to the practice of methods taught by other spiritual masters; teachings and stories from religions other than Hinduism; interpretations of sacred texts and verses; spiritual travel and insights; poetry; feedback and suggestions.

As a guideline, articles can be short (around 750 words), medium (around 1500 words) or in longer format (around 2300 words). Please send in your contributions through e-mail to editor.dp@rkdelhi.org

We look forward to hearing from you!

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Who was Ramana?

Advait Shrivastav

One likes to know more about a thing or a person one loves. William Wordsworth wrote: ‘The Child is father of the Man’. One’s past plays a significant role in what one becomes. It is this past of the beloved that a lover wants to know. The devotees of Ramana Maharshi are not different in this regard. Divine love is much greater and grander than romantic love. A devotee of this kind will therefore not be satisfied by reading the biography of Maharshi. He or she would want to know more about His past incarnations.

Maharshi was asked about His past lives several times but He replied to those questions in such a way that they are still unanswered. He was indifferent to this issue but the people around Him were not. Seshadri Swami, Ganapati Muni, and Krishna Bhikshu claimed that Maharshi was an incarnation of Skanda. The last two shared more information about His previous incarnations.

Seshadri Swami (also known as Mahan) was the first one to equate Maharshi with Skanda (also known as Subrahmanya). S. A. Subramanian translated Seshadri Swami’s biography (written by Kuzhumani Abinavasugabrahmam Narayana Sastrigal in 1939) into English. The text reports: “Mahan used to say many times that he was Parvathi Devi. He used to call Sri Ramana Bhagawan as Subrahmaniamurthy and characterised him as a child.”¹ This book conveys more about Seshadri Swami: “Swamiji drove away his devotees’ ailments whether it was paralysis or lung disease or fever or whatever serious illness, they all

¹ Seshadri Swamigal of Tiruvannamalai (published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in 1998), page number 72.

would vanish at the sight of Swamiji. Ghosts, devils, *brahmarakshas* would fly away. Scorpion, snake poison would all be reduced to ashes.”² An utterance made by such a powerful saint cannot be untrue. And that too about another mighty saint!

Ganapati Muni wrote on the subject of Maharshi’s incarnation in the eighteenth chapter of *Sri Ramana Gita*. He first says that Ramana is a manifestation of Kumara (Skanda). He states further that Ramana ‘is the third appearance here on earth of the God³ who pierced of yore the Krauncha Hill’.⁴ The other two incarnations were named Kumarila Bhatta (who was a great scholar and the writer of *Tantravartika*) and Thiru Jnana Sambandar (one of the foremost among the sixty-three Nayanmars).

Krishna Bhikshu devoted a chapter to this subject in his book *Sri Ramana Leela*. He offers various reasons in favour of the assumption that Maharshi was an incarnation of Skanda and concludes the chapter by saying: “As Kumarila he established the supremacy of the *karma marga*, as Jnana Sambandar, a poet, he brought *bhakti marga* close to the people and as Ramana he showed that the purpose of life was to abide in the Self and to stay in the *sahaja* state by the *jnana marga*.”⁵ Krishna Bhikshu also states “The Mahaswami of Kanchi Kamakoti *math* once said to a devotee that Ramana who came to uplift *jnana yoga* was the same as the one who earlier was Kumarila Bhatta.”⁶ The back cover of this book says: “In April 1949, Krishna Bhikshu sat before Bhagavan and read the book. Bhagavan made several corrections in the text. After this Krishna Bhikshu brought out the fourth edition in 1957. *Ramana Leela*, therefore, is the only biography of Sri Bhagavan that has been seen and corrected by him and hence authentic.” The quotations above were not edited out by Maharshi. This fact can serve as a major piece of evidence in this matter. Maharshi would have objected to these words if they had been untrue.

² *Ibid.*, page number 99.

³ *Skand*.

⁴ *Sri Ramana Gita*, English translation by Prof. K. Swaminathan, published by Sri Ramanasramam, chapter 18, verse 20.

⁵ *Sri Ramana Leela* (published by Sri Ramanasramam, 2018 edition), page number 314.

⁶ *Ibid.*, page number 313.

It is difficult to accurately pronounce on this matter but there is some indication that Bhagavan was indeed the incarnation of Skanda. Three people who were close to Maharshi cannot be wrong. Three people who had attained much advancement in their spiritual journeys. There is another major hint that leads to this conclusion. Maharshi wrote 'I have in search of my father and in obedience to his command started from here' in the note He left before permanently leaving for Tiruvannamalai. He said of Arunachala 'this Hill is Siva Himself'.⁷ The son came to search for His father. Ramana came to Arunachala. Skanda came to Shiva.

An article by Ra. Ganapati in the October-December 1984 issue⁸ of *Mountain Path* is titled '(SUB)RA(H)MAN(Y)A'. I found this title witty, creative and truthful too. Every incarnation of a human being is a creation and therefore illusory if one looks through the lens of Advaita. A devotee must not wonder 'Who was Ramana?'. He or she must question 'Who am I?'. This is the question Maharshi wanted *sadhakas* to ask. This is why He never provided answers to questions relating to his past incarnations. A few words of an enlightened man are enough to answer seven paragraphs of a devotee's doubts. One monumental utterance of Maharshi must be quoted to conclude this article: "An *Avatar* is only a partial manifestation of God, whereas a *Jnani* is God himself."⁹

[editor.dp@rkdeldhi.org]

7 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 143.

8 <http://www.sriramana.org/ramanafiles/mountainpath/1984%20IV%20Oct.pdf>

9 A *Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi* (published by Sri Ramanasramam, 2022 edition), page number 69.

Important events within the time frame of the current issue (November 2023 - January 2024) are as follows:

- Deepavali: 12th November
- Karthigai Festival commences: 17th November
- Deepam: 26th November
- Bhagavan's 144th Jayanti: 28th December
- Sivaprakasam Pillai Day: 12th January
- Ramaswami Pillai Day: 14th January
- Chinnaśwami Aradhana: 25th January
- Rajeswarananda Day: 31st January

1 + 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 = 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
SELF + IMAGININGS = THE WORLD

QUIZ

Try this quiz on Bhagavan and find out how well you know the life of Ramana Maharshi.



1 Bhagavan's parents had names in two different languages but both names had the same meaning. What did they mean?



2 In South India any new building is inaugurated with a grihapravesha ceremony and a cow is brought in before the owners formally enter. However, when a shed was built for cow Lakshmi, she refused to enter the building. What was she waiting for?



3 In which year did Bhagavan first arrive in Tiruvannamalai?

4 Name the underground section of the Arunachala temple, where Bhagavan stayed for some months when he took refuge from children who were pelting him with stones.



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SELF + AWARENESS = ONENESS

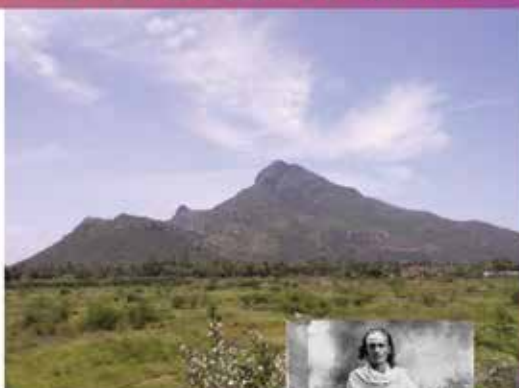
1 + 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 = 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
EGO + THOUGHTS = UNIVERSE of MAYA

5 Which poem did Bhagavan compose when his disciples asked him to create a special song that could be used when they went out to beg in the streets of Tiruvannamalai?

6 How long did Bhagavan stay in Virupaksha cave?



7 Name a well-known disciple of Bhagavan who was a great Sanskrit scholar and had received the title "one whose speech is poetry?"



8 How old was Bhagavan when he underwent a death experience which changed him completely and made him lose all fear of death?

9 How did Bhagavan get to know of Arunachala?



Answers ~
See next page



10 Who was the Englishman who described his meeting with Bhagavan in a very famous account of his spiritual quest in our country written in 1934?

1 + 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 = 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1
SELF + AWARENESS = CONSCIOUSNESS

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. His mother was Alagammal (Tamil) and his father Sundaram (Sanskrit). Both names mean 'good looking', 'handsome' or 'beautiful'. Bhagavan uses this fact in the opening lines of his poem "The Marital Garland of Letters". Addressing Arunachala he prays that they may both be indissolubly one, just as Alagu and Sundaram were one.
2. Lakshmi wanted Bhagavan to enter first. She stepped in after he did.
3. He arrived here on 1st September, 1896 and stayed there for the rest of his life.
4. Pathala Lingam.
5. "Akshara Mana Malai", or "The Marital Garland of Letters".
Each verse begins with a letter of the Tamil alphabet, starting with the first letter 'a' and moving in successive order.
6. He stayed there for seventeen years.
7. Kavyakantha Sri Ganapathi Sastry.
8. He was sixteen years old.
9. From his poetry we learn that even in "unthinking childhood" Arunachala shone within as something immensely holy. As a teenager, he learnt from a relative that Tiruvannamalai was a place on earth that one could visit. When he travelled to this temple town, Arunachala completely overpowered his mind and he realised Arunachala was "absolute stillness".
10. Paul Brunton, in his work, "A Search in Secret India".

"When the mind turns away from the objects, it beholds its source, consciousness. This is Self-abidance."

Ramana Maharshi (Upadesa Saram-16)

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Resonance and the Harmonics of Being

PART II

Michael Highburger

In the last segment we took up Bhagavan's remarks about *chidakasa* and endeavoured to decipher their meaning. In recalling Bhagavan's words, *the whole universe is only mental*¹, we wondered how such a statement should be understood. As an illustration, we made use of an image from the *Atharva Veda* concerning a cosmic net of jewels distributed in every direction throughout the cosmos, each jewel reflecting the light of every other. We then considered how *connectivity over distance* is identifiable in the observable universe through scientific disciplines such as astrophysics and quantum mechanics. If Bhagavan's *chidakasa* is a descriptor for the Self as a resonant field of knowing—containing all things and excluding nothing—we considered Bhagavan's surrender as the portal to the direct beholding of it. We have no direct access to the world, it could be said, because the world comes to us mediated through the senses. And yet, Bhagavan tells us the cosmic ether, *chidakasa*, is Pure Consciousness, free of any separation. Collapsing the distinction between heaven and earth, mind and matter, the transcendent and the immanent in a non-dual vision of the universe, he painted the picture of a seamless cosmic reality that is both inner and outer. What Bhagavan calls *bhootakasa* and *manakasa* are subsumed under *chidakasa*, a continuous uniform underlying pattern of connectivity extending throughout the created and divine

¹ *Talks*, §451.

order. If Bhagavan's surrender is the means for accessing it, then we are bound to ask – *what is surrender?*

Traditional Surrender

By tradition, surrender has always meant giving over everything to God, i.e. accepting everything that is favourable for cultivating devotion to God. Surrender (*saranagati*) is intended to help us cultivate a humble attitude of non-attachment.

In the *Ramayana*, Valmiki asks Narada if there is 'even one righteous man still left in the world'. Rama is just that man, and his righteousness is demonstrated from the very beginning of the story in his going forth from the palace in utter and willing submission to a decree of his father wanting to oblige the youngster's foster mother.

The five-year-old Druva is likewise the embodiment of *saranagati*, suffering patiently at the hands of his envious foster mother, Suruchi. If *saranagati* means 'taking refuge' (*agat* = the one who takes; *saran* = refuge), it is not just a question of giving oneself over to God but giving oneself over to whatever conditions obtain in any given situation no matter how unjust. Bhagavan takes surrender a step further: surrender (*prapatti*) and dispassion (*vairagya*) demand not only putting oneself in God's care, but relinquishing *every want or preference and every last trace of resistance as well as anything that looks like personal will*.

Bhagavan's self-surrender means letting go of worldly consolations and taking refuge in the inner resources of the heart. Bhagavan's self-surrender is *suffering what comes our way*² i.e., giving oneself over to circumstances just as they appear without demanding they be otherwise. For Bhagavan surrender is much more than a recipe for healthy living: In allowing ourselves to *suffer what comes our way*, the bondage that has oppressed us our entire life (or for countless lives) begins to loosen, and we are increasingly enabled to distinguish between the real and the unreal, seeing ever more clearly until the *wisdom of the ether* gradually begins to reveal itself. How does this work?

² 'Encounters with Bhagavan', Part II, T. R. Kanakammal, *The Mountain Path*, July 2006, pp. 31-32.

Surrender is composure and harmonisation. Non-surrender is reactivity and egoic entrenchment. If we want to be free of delusion and ignorance, we must gain access to clear seeing. Here we approach our non-resistance non-judgmentally inquiring into what we are reacting against. Such inquiry helps us see that ego is just the name we give to the 'one' reacting. But ego is reactivity itself. By seeing ego as reactivity, we begin to work carefully and patiently with each episode of reactivity in its various forms. We learn to make friends with what we are reacting against, trusting that every unwholesome mental state has a fitting response and available remedy.

Surrender means letting go of anything that doesn't lead to Bhagavan. If surrender sounds like a passive state, it is actually quite dynamic and energetic. In being confronted with *vasanas* and defilements, we go after them in the meditation setting, first identifying them, then looking for their hidden underlying motivations and causes in order to discover their intrinsic nature. We do not treat them as enemies but as crying babies longing for the touch of the mother. Because we are accustomed to life in a sense world in this era of hyper-consumerism where everything is there to grant provisional satisfaction, this work is tricky, not least of all, owing to the lack of presence of mind and the habit of looking for relief outside ourselves.

Surrender begins in overcoming longings for what we do not *have* and moderating resistance to what we do not *want*. This involves looking for the unappealing aspects inherent in what *we are longing for* and the beautiful aspects inherent in *what we are resisting*. Through attention and exertion, we teach ourselves to regulate the mind, seeing that each particle of clutter is a link in the burgeoning chain of sequential thinking. Ruminative thought and conceptual proliferation are the root and source of the obstructions to stillness.

Penetrating the Veils

The meditation traditions speak of 'swift wisdom' (*javanaprajna*) born of deep stillness which emerges naturally to divulge the 'secrets of the world'. If this sounds otherworldly or magical, it is quite ordinary, and

is available to every devotee willing to put forth sustained effort. In stilling the mind, obstructions fall away. As meditative stillness grows, a world of pristine purity begins to present itself allowing us to see things free of the distorting influences of our neurotic mind.

What are these distorting influences? Bhagavan calls them *avarana* ('coverings' or 'obstructions'). *Avarana* are *veils of ignorance* which confuse and distort perception. Born of karmic impurities, they arise in the mind as non-surrender and include disadvantageous mental states such as anger, resistance, vexation, blame, grasping, attachment, desire, hatred, fear, anxiety, doubt, restlessness, clinging, just to name a few. Their strength appears formidable, but in fact the veils are only orphans of the psyche born of karmic debris.

*Ajnana has two aspects: avarana (veiling) and vikshepa (multiplicity). Of these, avarana denotes the veil hiding the Truth. If the veil, i.e., avarana is lifted, the Truth is perceived.*³

While Bhagavan doesn't elaborate on the nature of the veils and their causes, time spent on the meditation cushion points to their non-solidity and over time one begins to see that they are not fixed or permanent entities, are not destined to remain forever nor do they constitute a separate self.

Meditative stillness causes the veils to miraculously drop away, at least temporarily. No reactivity, resistance or negative mental state can rear its ugly head when the mind is perfectly still. Veil-free moments allow us to process, heal and assimilate karmic residues born of past actions. They also grant a glimpse of the cosmic ether, inspiring us to further efforts. Here we see the power of Bhagavan's teaching. As meditative stillness is not permanent, the veils are sure to return. But the clear seeing that emerges in their absence, even if short-lived, leaves an indelible impression. The hitch in all this, of course, is quietening the mind. A devotee may lament that his or her karma does not allow for the quietening of the mind. But a quiet mind—the Silence Bhagavan speaks of – is one's own natural condition. Bhagavan tells us that nothing and no one can prevent the determined devotee from bringing it about as it is our birthright. Developing the capacity

³ *Talks*, §519; see also *Talks*, §579.

to make the mind perfectly still and empty of rumination is doable. It is not easy because it entails undoing years (or perhaps lifetimes) of habits and compulsions. Successfully going up against any addiction, while always challenging, is nevertheless possible so long as our determination is strong enough. In time we discover that the veils do not arise of necessity nor is their apparent fixity vouchsafed by some deterministic arrangement. Their impact diminishes in the course of repeated moments of clarity. When we find ourselves back in the usual state of mental agitation, the world takes on its familiar flawed appearance. But during moments of stillness free of the veils, the world looks whole and complete. Bhagavan says:

*If you consider yourself the body, the world appears to be external. But when you are the Self, the world appears as Brahman.*⁴

Clear Seeing

Momentary freedom from the veils allows us to see how non-surrender is fundamentally discontinuous with the harmonic flow of Being. Meditative stillness unmask the veils and lays bare the unitive contours of the cosmos, hinting at our non-ego nature. Each instance of surrender provides an opportunity to see our true nature as the reflected light of Bhagavan's mirror. We begin to understand the impersonal nature of non-surrender and are no longer agonized by it, like the wave when once understanding its ocean-nature is no longer agonized by buffeting winds. Resuming daily activities, the veils reassert their power, causing the former clarity to appear dreamlike. The veils appear so solid that we give them a name—call them 'I' or 'ego'—but Bhagavan tells us they are not anything enduring nor even a thing at all but are mere fragments of a non-integrated psyche. Though our meditation breakthroughs become less salient and fade away over time, we soldier on in a stepwise progression through recurring cycles of clarity and opaqueness, wisdom and confusion, insight and dullness according to alternating periods of meditation versus daily activities in the world. In the midst of it all, we trust that our *vasanas* and defilements will gradually diminish:

⁴ *Talks*, §272.

*Jnana, once revealed, takes time to steady itself. The Self is certainly within the [range of the] direct experience of everyone, but not as one imagines it to be. It is only as it is. This experience is samadhi. The Self remains veiled by vasanas and reveals itself when there are no vasanas. Owing to the fluctuation of the vasanas, jnana takes time to steady itself. Unsteady jnana is not enough to check rebirths. Jnana cannot remain unshaken side by side with vasanas.*⁵

Samadhi here means absolute stillness, what Bhagavan calls *the unbroken Silence of the Self*.⁶ Such a state, even if only momentary, affords a peek at the resonant field of knowing (*jnana*) that comprises all of reality. Looking deep into Indra's Net, we behold its jewels with eyes of investigation in a spirit of relinquishment. Here self-enquiry and surrender converge, working in tandem like two wings of a dove. Bhagavan tells us:

*Jnana Marga and Bhakti Marga (prapatti) are one and the same. Self-surrender leads to realisation just as enquiry does. Complete self-surrender means that you have no further thought of 'I'. Then all your predispositions (samskaras) are washed away, and you are free.*⁷

Stabilising the busy thinking mind is the cure for non-surrender. It opens the door to a lively energetic knowing wherein the universe speaks to us through *direct seeing*. If unobstructed seeing initiates the dovetailing of disparate strands of the psyche, it is no accident that sages of old were referred to as 'seers'. Indeed, direct seeing is the source and origin of any integrated spiritual knowledge. And yet, direct seeing is very simple. When the mind's eye can operate free of distorting influences, seeing one thing truly means seeing everything as it is, i.e. seeing directly that the universal continuum, inward and outward, is even, smooth, seamless and uniform. Direct seeing is simply glimpsing the common patterning that undergirds our world and our hearts. It is recognized in an instant during extended periods of meditative stillness. Here we come to understand that the *swift wisdom* of the ancients is simply born of extended periods of meditative stillness.

⁵ Talks, §141.

⁶ Parayana, p. 124.

⁷ Talks, §31.

In Bhagavan's life, we discover the cumulative impact of long periods of meditative stillness when we recall a scene from the days at the Mango Grove. Palaniswami had been given access to the Tamil library of a deceased Swami. As Palaniswami's native tongue was Malayalam, he struggled to read these Tamil texts. Bhagavan felt called to assist him even though he had not read anything since setting aside his schoolbooks in Madurai two years earlier. The young sage found himself reading works of Vedanta and advaitic philosophy for the first time and could comprehend them with great ease. Even though he had never read the *Yoga Vasishtam*, *Kaivalya Navanitam* and *Ribhu Gita* or even merely heard their titles before, their content was utterly familiar to him. In them he discovered 'exact descriptions of his own state' and knew first-hand the spiritual stages they outlined.⁸ Later, after only a single first reading of the *Dakshinamurthy Stotra*, he gave an expert discourse on its otherwise gnarly philosophical nuances. Where did this sudden masterful command of doctrine come from?

We recall not so many years earlier that his elder brother teased him about his lack of familiarity with spiritual language. It was in 1893 when Vivekananda returned by ship from the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago and Bhagavan had mispronounced the Swamiji's name. This showed that Bhagavan did not have any real acquaintance with spiritual matters. Yet just six years later in the aftermath of long months of intensive meditation, we find he had become the master of masters with the highest degree of philosophical insight, his mind clear and bright like a perfect mirror faithfully reflecting all that appeared before it:

*The jivanmukti state is compared to the reflection of a spotless mirror in another similar mirror. What will be found in such a reflection? Pure Akasa... Reaching the source of the 'I-thought' [means] destruction of the ego and is the attainment of the goal, is prapatti (surrender), is jnana.*⁹

If the quintessential feature of meditative stillness is absence of the veils, Bhagavan's surrender is the path that leads to it, granting access to a vast field of knowing. Surrender in its purest form is free of self-reference. As our investigation matures, it points us toward compassion

⁸ *In the Kitchen with Bhagavan* (unpublished manuscript), p. 33.

⁹ *Talks*, §513, §129.

and dispassion, namely, knowing how to care for what needs caring for and how to let go of what needs letting go of.

The Upanishads say no matter how you cut sandalwood, *each piece is it*. Bhagavan says no matter how you fashion an ornament of pure gold (or whether you melt it down), *it is still gold*.¹⁰ Likewise, when we behold the natural order veil-free, say, the patterning on a leaf, the texture of a stone, the wisps in a cloud or the lines in the face of a child, the underlying character of the created realm announces itself in full.

Wisdom of the ether is knowledge born of true seeing, but its most salient feature and prized reward is *peace*. Glimpsing the fractal relatedness of all things occasions a gradual diminution of the agitating influences of the veils. As they recede, clear seeing is augmented, eliciting further wisdom, thereby bringing further peace, which in turn allows for deeper stillness and creates the conditions for further receding of the veils. If, as has been said, letting go a little brings a little peace and letting go a lot brings a lot of peace, then *letting go completely brings complete peace*.¹¹ This is Bhagavan's surrender.

In this connection, we recall a scene in the Hall. A Maharani tells Bhagavan, 'I have all that I want, but I do not have peace of mind. Something prevents it. Probably my destiny'. There was silence for a while. Then Bhagavan spoke in his usual sweet manner:

*'There is no destiny. [Just] surrender, and all will be well. Throw all the responsibility on God and do not bear the burden yourself. What can destiny do to you then?' The Maharani replied, 'Surrender is impossible.' To which Bhagavan said, 'Yes, complete surrender is impossible in the beginning [but] partial surrender is certainly possible for all [and] in course of time, will lead to complete surrender. Without surrender there [can be] no peace of mind'... [Elsewhere he adds:] 'Your peace will [become] deeper and more prolonged with continued practice and will [ultimately] lead to the goal.'*¹²

(to be continued)

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¹⁰ Talks, §32.

¹¹ *Luang Por Chah*.

¹² *Gems*, p. 24; also in Talks, §244; the final phrase from Talks, §73.

The Sleep of Pitiful Corpses

Those who do not know
how to dispel their suffering
by putting down their luggage,
(as they travel) in the train
that is the great refuge
which supports them all,
will, out of egoism,
keep that burden upon their heads,
convinced it is they who support it,
and in vain endure eternal suffering.



On asking the question 'Who are you?'
those who rage like the unquiet sea
will be as if struck dumb,
and subside there and then.

They sleep the sleep of pitiful corpses,
losing the power of consciousness,
and unless they are woken up
(by the power of the Self)
they will not awaken.

~Ramana Puranam, lines 171-178,
written jointly by Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Muruganar,
translated from the original Tamil by
David Godman, Robert Butler, and T. V. Venkatasubramanian.



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What Is Meditation?

Gajanan Netravali

An explanation of what meditation is according to the teaching of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

“I find meditation very difficult and confusing. Can you explain it to me in simple terms?”

Sure! Meditation as taught by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is very simple and direct. Let me explain.

The goal of every sadhana, whether it is reading scriptures, reciting shlokas, doing *japa*, visiting the Guru or meditation, is Self-realisation or Self-knowledge, is it not? We will use the term *svarupa jnana* for Self-knowledge.

We then have to ask the question “What is *Svarupa*?”

To put it into words, *svarupa* is that essence without which an entity is not itself. Let us examine this with an example.

I give you some white crystals which you taste and immediately say: “It is sweet, so it is sugar.”

Next, I give you a white powder which you taste and say: “It is sweet so it is sugar. You must have ground the sugar into powder.”

Next, I give you crystals of various colours – blue, green, yellow, red – and you taste it and say: “It is sweet, so it is sugar. You must have added various colours to the sugar crystals.”

Next, I give you a big shapeless, colourless lump and you taste it and say: “This is sweet, so it is sugar. You must have made it into a shapeless mass.”

Next, I give you some white crystals. You look at it and say it is sugar but when you taste it, it is tasteless and you say: “Even though it

looks like sugar, it is not sugar because it is not sweet.”

So, the colour, form and shape can change but what absolutely cannot change is the sweetness of sugar. If it is sugar it has to be sweet.

So, we can say the *svarupa* of sugar is sweetness.

And *svarupa* is absolutely constant and changeless. We cannot say that the sugar was sweet a second ago but is not sweet now, or that it was not sweet a second ago, but it is sweet now. If it is sugar it has to be sweet all the time.

Let us move to the next point.

Our sages, rishis, gurus and scriptures have given us two dicta or statements as tests to determine the nature of the unreal and real.

1. Whatever is not constant by nature, is changing all the time, is unreal. The world is by its very nature changing all the time and is therefore not real.
2. Whatever is by its very nature constant and changeless all the time is real.
They have not stopped at this but have also made a third statement which states:
3. Your true nature or your *Svarupa* is changeless and is therefore Real.

Now, I want to test for myself, here and now, whether the third statement is true. I will not accept it as true just because the rishis or scriptures have said it, but I want to test for myself whether it is really so. Is there something in me that is constant and changeless?

For our illustration let us take the case of yourself, the reader. Let us imagine that you are sitting on a chair, just relaxed.

As you sit there relaxed, do you know there are things around you?
“Yes”.

Because of what do you know the things around you?

(Here ‘knowing’ means being aware of whatever is there in the surroundings. So, if a person is sitting at home he or she will be aware of things such as furniture and sounds such as the voices of the people around. If a person is in the forest he or she will know the trees and sounds of birds and animals.)

“I know the things around me because of my eyes, ears, nose – the five senses.”

The five senses are just the instruments. But if a life-size doll is sitting on a chair would it know the surroundings? Or say a person is sitting and has a sudden cardiac arrest and dies. Would the lifeless body know the surroundings even though the eyes, ears, nose etc. are present?

“I understand that I know the things around me because of Consciousness or Awareness.”

Ok, let us do a small experiment.

You are still sitting on the chair, relaxed, but you are now a five-year-old child. You are just 2 feet tall. Your feet don't even reach the floor. You are still sitting on the chair relaxed. Because of what do you know the things around you?

“Because of Awareness.”

Now, in a flash you are 15 years old. You are still sitting on the chair, relaxed. But now you are 4 feet tall. There are immense hormonal changes happening in your body. Your voice is changing and also the outward physical change, according to whether you are a boy or girl. Do you know the things around you? And because of what do you know the things around you?

“Because of Awareness.”

Now, in a flash you are 30 years old. You have reached your full height. You are physically strong and confident of facing any challenge that you may face. You are still sitting on the chair, relaxed. Do you know the things around you? And because of what do you know the things around you?

“Because of Awareness.”

Now in a flash, you are fifty years old. You are still sitting on the chair, relaxed. Your hair is greying, there is slight pain in the joints. You are not too keen to do anything new and are less physically active. Do you ‘know’ the things around you? And because of what do you know the things around you?

“Because of Awareness.”

Now, let us say for the purpose of our illustration, in a flash you are

70 years old. Your hair is grey. Many of your teeth have fallen and your eyesight is also not sharp. You feel physically weak. You are still sitting relaxed on the same chair. Do you know the things around you? And because of what do you know the things around you?

“Because of Awareness.”

So, we have mentally moved a person from 5 to 70 years in a few minutes. The body has changed immensely but has the Awareness changed?

“No. It has remained changeless.”

So, our true nature or *svarupa* is the changeless Awareness.

Let me ask you a few questions.

Are you alive now?

“Yes.”

Are you conscious now?

“Yes.”

Do you exist now?

“Yes.”

Are you aware now?

“Yes.”

Do you have any doubt whether you are conscious, or aware or you had to think before you answered? Am I aware now? or Am I conscious? Without any words do you know your own existence or does someone have to tell you that you exist.

“I had no doubt about my own existence.”

So, you see for the simple fact of existence so many words consciousness, existence, awareness, I, I am etc. have been used which is very confusing. But sitting there relaxed, without using any words, you know that you are alive. This life or consciousness or awareness is spontaneous and is not given by anyone external to you. It is *swayamprakash*, shining by itself.

It is self-evident and no proof is required for your existence. If someone asks you to prove that you exist, what proof will you give?

“I will make them feel my pulse or breathing.”

But this can be done by a machine like the heart lung machine. How do you prove to yourself that you are alive and you exist? For

example, when you are in deep sleep or when you are unconscious for some reason, and you wake up or regain consciousness again, do you feel you did not exist during the period of sleep or unconsciousness? You do not doubt your existence even though you were not aware or conscious of the body or surroundings. So, if someone asks you for proof that you existed during deep sleep or when you were unconscious how will you prove it?

“I do not need any external proof that I exist. I know that I exist even in deep sleep or while unconscious.”

Svarupa is Pratyaksh or directly perceived.

“So, what does the advice to ‘go inside’ or ‘look within’ mean?”

There is no inside or outside for Awareness. Let us say that you are sitting quietly looking out of a large window. At a distance there is a tree full of beautiful flowers. You see the tree swaying gently in the breeze and it is beautiful to see. You are happy because you have many good memories of climbing the tree as a child.

How do you know the tree, which is supposedly outside? Because of what do you know the tree and its gentle movement in the breeze?

“Because of Awareness.”

How do you know the happiness, which is supposed to be inside? Because of what do you know the happiness?

“Because of Awareness.”

Let us say suddenly there is a strong wind and the branches break and the leaves and flowers are scattered on the ground. You are sad and shocked at the damage to the tree. Because of what do you know the breaking of the tree and the state of the flowers and leaves which are all supposedly outside?

“Because of Awareness.”

Because of what do you know the shock and sadness, which are taken to be inside?

“Because of Awareness.”

Is it not the same Awareness?

“Yes, it is the same Awareness.”

So, for Awareness there is no inside and outside. So ‘go in’ or ‘look within’ may be taken to be terms to encourage us to stop interpreting

the world and direct our attention to the force that cognizes all phenomena.

In fact, everything is within Awareness only, which is one indivisible whole. This can be illustrated by an example.

Let us say there is a small pot. This pot is limited by its size and can contain or hold only a limited amount of material. There is space or Akash within the pot which seems limited by the size of the pot. Outside the pot there is infinite space or Akash. As long as the pot exists the space within the pot seems to be separate and limited. When the pot dies (breaks) the limited space 'within' the pot and the infinite space 'outside' the pot become one single space. But is it not a fact that what exists is infinite space in which the pot appears to exist for a limited amount of time? The limited space within the pot is only a mental concept – it is the mind which limits the limitless and indivisible space or Akash. This function of the mind of limiting and differentiating is necessary for practical purposes. The mind imposes limits such as the form of the pot to space or Akash which is essentially infinite.

So also, Awareness is One Infinite Indivisible whole, but the mind limits it to this body which appears (is born) and exists for a limited span of time. This limiting of the One Infinite Indivisible Awareness which is our true nature or *svarupa* is the cause of misery and all sadhana is done to eliminate this division and exist in effortless awareness.

“Why do you say ‘effortless Awareness?’”

Well, are you Aware now?

“Yes, of course!”

Do you have to make an effort to be Aware? Or is it effortless?

“It is effortless.”

As we saw it is *swayamprakash* or *shining* effortlessly, spontaneously by itself. So no effort is necessary to be Aware. So we need to *just be, as Awareness, which is our own svarupa*.

No other sadhana or exercise is required to purify the body or mind for *svarupa* jnana.

“Is pranayama (breathing exercises) or yoga not necessary in order to purify the mind?”

Our Svarupa is always pure and no sadhana or exercise is needed

to make it pure. For example. The outer space which we call Akash (sky) is so pure that we cannot replicate it in any laboratory in the world. That pure Akash, which is all pervading, is here around us as the background. If something is burning outside and smoke enters the room, the entire air in the room becomes black. It is only the air (vayu) that gets affected and becomes impure, but does the Akash get affected? Does it become impure?

“No.”

Let us say that there are many flowers in the room and the air is filled with fragrance. The air in the room becomes fragrant but does the Akash which forms the background get affected?

“No. It is always pure.”

So also our *svarupa* or Awareness is always pure and there is no need to purify it. It cannot be made impure in any way because nothing can affect it. Lord Krishna in the *Bhagawad Gita* says that the sword cannot cut it, water cannot wet it, nor fire burn it.

“So, what is the sadhana to be done?”

Do Nothing. Keep quiet; Just be.”

“Why?”

What is your name?

“Advait.” (The reader may replace ‘Advait’ with his or her own name.)

What do you have to do in order to be Advait?

“Hmm...”

Do you have to do anything to be Advait?

“Nothing.”

That is the ‘Do Nothing’. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, when asked what is to be done as Sadhana would say ‘Summa Iru (just be; keep quiet.)’

Why must you do nothing in order to be Advait?

“Because I am already Advait.”

Yes, so also you have nothing to do to be your own *svarupa* because you are already your *svarupa*.

So, if anyone still feels something must be done, some practical tips can be followed.

Sit comfortably in any posture such as *sukhasana*. One may even sit comfortably on a chair.

Keep your eyes open or half closed.

Relax the body consciously and let go. Just sit relaxed, Sahaj, and just be as Awareness, which is our Svarupa. So you are effortlessly aware of the things and events happening around. If you are caught up in a train of thought, then as soon as you notice that you are thinking, it can be stopped and again you can rest in Awareness. Understand that whatever is happening around you as you sit in meditation is merely the content of awareness. So, if a dog is barking loudly, there is awareness of it. If there is irritation at the loud barking, understand that it is a reaction of the mind and there is awareness of the irritation. Or if there is sweet music, there is awareness of it. If there is attraction to the music, understand that it is the reaction of the mind and there is awareness of the attraction. In and as Awareness there is no attraction or rejection of anything, or any event which is merely a happening in Awareness. Awareness is the power or light by which everything is known and it is neutral.

This then is obeying the advice to do nothing, '*Summa Iru*' to be in the Now. When someone asked Bhagavan "When can one practise *sahaja samadhi*? Bhagavan replied: "Even from the beginning." This reply indicates that at one level, this state exists from the beginning and cannot in the ordinary sense be practiced. Attention can be focused on it.

This relaxed Awareness or Effortless Awareness is itself meditation and attention can be directed to awareness, even in the midst of activity. If one is doing sadhana then it makes no sense straining to achieve it, or waiting for this state to happen. All one can do is be attentive to its immense, ever-present and awe-inspiring existence.

Since everyone is effortlessly aware, all are Self-realised or all have *svarupa jnana*. There is nothing to be achieved.

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Talk 339

With regard to *Siva Visishtadvaita*, (i.e., *Saiva Siddhanta*), Sri Bhagavan said: *Garudoham bhavana* 'I am Garuda' - conception does not make a *garuda* of a man. All the same the poisonous effects of snake-bite are cured. Similarly with *Sivoham bhavana* (I-am-Siva) conception also. One is not transformed into Siva, but the ruinous effects of the ego are put an end to. Or the person retains his individuality but remains pure, i.e., fit for constituting a part of the body of Siva. Becoming so he can enjoy the Supreme Bliss. That is liberation - say the *Saiva Siddhantis*. This simply betrays the love of their individuality and is in no way the true experience of liberation.

Talk 366

Before leaving at 3-30 p.m., Mrs. Dodwell raised a second question, asking what is meant by *neti-neti*.

M.: There is now wrong identification of the Self with the body, senses, etc. You proceed to discard these, and this is *neti*. This can be done only by holding to the one which cannot be discarded. That is *iti* alone.

Talk 483

Mr. *Sitaramiah*, a visitor: What does *samyamana* mean in Patanjali Yoga Sutra?

M.: One-pointedness of mind.

D.: By such *samyamana* in the Heart, *chitta samvit* is said to result. What does it mean?

M.: *Chitta samvit* is *Atma jnana* i.e., Knowledge of the Self.

Keeklee

Bharati Mirchandani

Look how happily the girls hold hands and spin.
Their eyes shine with excitement, faces flush,
plaits and ponytail fly, small curls cling to their damp faces.
Their feet confidently shuffle, quick, tiny movements.
Their arms stretch, supporting, trusting, each other totally.
They spin, like yin and yang, forever. Until they let go...

Jivita, the fairer one has sharper features.
Brightly patterned chiffon dress swirls like the fins of
an angel fish in a pool of coral. Serene. Peaceful.
The dusky one, Kalika, wears a dress of recycled
black garbage bags that swoosh as she swings.
The eyes and teeth of both girls gleam like pearls.
And tiny gleaming pearls spray outward from their spinning,
only to vanish into the air. No sound of one ever hitting a wall,
or bouncing on the ground. As ephemeral as photisms that
the young Sri Ramakrishna saw as dancing stars for 3 days and 3 nights.
Not pearls that one could collect to make a mala. Yet whirl
like prayer beads, while the girls, Life and Death,
spin like prayer wheels at a Tibetan monastery, gone hyper.

Till, suddenly, surprisingly, without any warning,
they let go. Their hands unclasp, arms fly free,
and they're flung to opposite horizons.
Except the horizons disappear, just as the flying pearls vanished.
Without a trace. And the landscape remains, empty, vast, silent.
No sign of Jivita, Kalika. Words emerge, like single notes on a piano,
and fade into the memory of vibration...
'Death', 'Atman', 'God', 'Brahmand', 'Light'...
a few notes played once, and lost forever.

It is a vast hall of nothingness.
No differences, no partitions, no divisions, no fear,
no hate, no birth, no death. No place to rest one's feet. Falling,
falling, with no place to fall to, or from.
There is no real movement at all...
no place, no time, no space between things, no things...

Emptiness.

That's love.

That's everything.

Letting Go – Mandodari's Quest for Sita

N.K.

In Valmiki's Ramayana, Ravana's wife Mandodari surfaces with a single soliloquy only when her husband has been slain by Rama – his body clothed in yellow garments and dazzling bracelets like a dark-hued cloud once riven by lightning – now riven by so many arrows that she cannot embrace it. Her address to her dead husband is a rich mixture of grief, attachment, horror, regret, awareness and acceptance. It also echoes the recognition of a woman – a chief queen – who felt she was invincible through the protection of her father – the King of the *danavas*, her consort – the Lord of the Titans, and her son – the conqueror of Indra, but in the end must stand alone, stripped of all protection barring the strength of her awareness as witness to the implacable turn of Destiny.

In her soliloquy, Mandodari swings between grief and pride, disbelief and objectivity, nostalgia and awareness – an acute awareness of the salient causes that led to a tragedy so colossal that it wiped out an entire race. She takes pride in the boons that her husband won through hard penance from Brahma, the Creator himself. But she also displays pride in her husband's excesses, protected as he was from the power of these boons: to instill terror in the great sages and illustrious *gandharvas*, to use magic in battle, to utter insolent threats in the presence of the enemy, to rob the Gods, *asuras* and men of their daughters, to plunge the widows of foes into mourning. All this she tolerates because she believes in Ravana's unlimited valor and strength – as unsurpassed conqueror, as support of family and attendants, as guide of the people, as savior of the Titan race.

When Brahma grants boons to Ravana as reward for his great penance in subduing the senses, Ravana seeks immunity from *devas*, *danavas* and *rakshasas*, not bothering to include the meek human race. Mandodari echoes the same dismissal. She cannot believe that her husband could have been defeated by ‘a mere mortal, a mere man, a wanderer in the forest.’ But she is no fool. She has heard of the feats of this ‘wanderer’ in Janasthana – shades of things to come. Rama first kills mountainous demon Viradha who dares hold his wife Sita in his lap, then Ravana’s brother Khara along with his commanders Dushana and Trishira and 14,000 Titans. Then on his way to the kingdom of the monkey kings in search of Sita, Rama kills the demon Kabandha, then the mighty monkey king Bali himself, re-instating Bali’s unlawfully exiled brother Sugriva to the throne of Kishkinda. And Sugriva’s army chieftain Hanuman audaciously enters Lanka, inaccessible to the Gods themselves.

She counsels her husband. There is only the briefest of references to Mandodari counseling Ravana not to foster enmity with Rama. But the suggestion is that she counsels him consistently and unrelentingly: “How often did I address you, saying, ‘Have we nothing to fear from Raghava?’ but you did not heed me. These are the consequences,” she says.

That her husband who attained inconceivable powers by subduing his senses should be conquered by his senses, in turn, is obvious to her in her address. There is a foreshadowing of this in the lamentations of the women who gather to mourn the death of their menfolk after Mandodari’s invincible son Indrajit is killed and Ravana’s army routed.

The women refer to Ravana’s arrogance on account of the boons he received, his not heeding the wise counsel of his brothers Vibhishina and Kumbhakarna to return Sita whom he forcibly abducted, and his unawareness of the omens that presaged complete destruction by a force called Rama. Mandodari gets a clear glimpse of this force. First she considers her husband’s death by Rama, a human being, as destiny and then dismisses this. Next, she considers him being killed by Indra, the Lord of the gods, but dismisses this again - her husband being more powerful than the celestials. Then with riveting awareness, she

pronounces, 'Assuredly it was that great Yogi, the Supreme Soul, the Eternal Spirit who was your slayer. He has no beginning, middle or end, the most High, greater than Mahat (cosmic intellect), the Support of Nature...' She finally sees in Rama this force manifested, the force of the everlasting Vishnu who carries the conch, the discus and the mace and to whom prosperity belongs.

This awareness comes early in her address. Yet the heart of her soliloquy reveals a woman who is attached to her husband physically, emotionally and through the fatalism of fortune. She refers to his charming eyebrows, brilliant complexion and arched nose; to his beauty, splendor and radiance which rivalled the moon, the lotus and the sun. She speaks of how they sported together on famous mounts and woods and the gardens of the gods in a chariot of incomparable magnificence, beholding innumerable countries 'whilst now I am deprived of all pleasures and enjoyments by your death, O Hero!' She feels transformed as if into another, condemned by the fluctuations of the fortunes of kings to widowhood as the final period of her life. Her grief is rendered through images of comparison: 'Having rested on sumptuous couches, O King of the Titans, how is it that you are now sleeping on the earth, the dust your coverlet?'

Even through her attachment, desire and grief, Mandodari does not lose her objectivity. She sees that even while possessing valor, Ravana misused his power to assume any form at will by using disguise as deception. She wonders with horror how he could have been so base as to carry away a woman by luring her husband Rama away with the help of an illusory deer. She sees that despite his famed valor, he had been so intoxicated by his own powers that he had separated Sita from Laxmana's protection to forcibly carry her away. She nearly utters a curse: 'Since all the Gods with Agni at their head feared you, you were not instantly destroyed when you did lay brutal hands on that slender-waisted lady.' But her curse is present in her knowledge that the women widowed through this war, firm in their duty, devoted to their husbands, submissive to their Gurus had cursed him in their grief, and so brought about his retribution.

There is no indication that Mandodari meets Sita while she is held

prisoner in Lanka – neither in Valmiki's Ramayana, nor in twelfth century poet Kampan's Tamil Ramayana. Yet, it is by confronting the reality of Sita that Mandodari reaches her finest moment. She is fully aware that the key to her husband's lust, anger and ultimate destruction lay in his infatuation with Sita. For a moment, she sees it in physical terms: that he had possessed other women who were far more beautiful than Sita, but in his infatuation with Sita had not realized this. She raises the bar. She sees Sita as nobler than Arundhati who in Puranic literature is the wife of Sage Vasishtha, an epitome of chastity, wifely devotion and conjugal bliss. Then flow her famous words, 'Not by birth, nor in beauty, nor in qualities is Sita better than me – not even my equal. Only, you did not know.' Then she realises what it is that had obsessed her husband: 'O My Lord, the asceticism of that lady faithful to her husband, has consumed you!'

There are innumerable re-tellings of the Ramayana. The written versions were often changed by professional reciters to suit contemporary aspirations and thinking. Sometimes, the story reflected significant variations that changed the very concept of the character and the meaning of the event associated with her/him. In the book, 'In search of Sita: revisiting mythology' edited by Malashri Lal and Namita Gokhale (Penguin India and Yatra books, 2009), there is an essay by Smita Tewari Jassal in which she describes a moving encounter between Mandodari and Sita as depicted in Bhojpuri women's songs.

In essence, the songs sing of Mandodari paying Sita a visit in grand finery. This dazzle turns as cool as a moonbeam in Sita's luminous presence as if the sun itself was struck speechless with awe and wonder. Mandodari asks, 'If you were indeed so chaste and pure, Sita, how come you went off with the husband of another?' Sita replies, 'Chaste and pure I ever was – merely came to see this kingdom of yours.' At these words, tears roll down Mandodari's eyes.

Writes Jassal, 'The song notes the transformation in Mandodari's consciousness when confronted with Sita's divinity and awe-inspiring presence. When Mandodari sets out to confront Sita, it is once again Sita's fire of chastity that first 'melts' down her pride, then evokes reverence and humility. Hence, instead of the challenging mood of

rivalry suggested at the beginning of the encounter, what we witness is a shedding of layers of artifice in a final expression of feminine solidarity and understanding.’

In fact, in the deep and subtle interpretation of the Adhyatma Ramayana, it is said that Ravana was totally convinced of the power of Rama as a manifestation of Vishnu and had decided that the surest way to attain abidance in the Self/Vishnu was by being killed by Rama. So in kidnapping Sita, his sole aim was that Rama should come to rescue her, wage a war with him, and kill him. In the same way, perhaps Mandodari did not really mourn Ravana but mourned her own pride, her own material desires and misfortunes which she could only resolve by confronting them, bearing witness to them, and letting them go – as in the Bhojpuri women’s songs – in her realisation of the pure divine Spirit of Sita.

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Enhance Your SQ, Resolve the Unresolved

Prof. Vijay Vancheswar

We live in a rapidly evolving age, technologically, socially, and economically. Smart advancements in artificial intelligence provide us with remarkable solutions to solve complex issues. Examples include new age platforms such as ChatGPT and deep learning tools, inspired by the brain's neural networks.

However, the bipolar nature of creation sets in motion the law of unintended consequences. We witness a rise in unease triggered by an increasing focus on fast outcomes and high expectations. The resultant mismatch between what is aspired and what is obtained, leads to a state of cognitive dissonance. The mind plays truant, increasing stress and anxiety levels. Developing our emotional intelligence helps. It kindles development of our nobler qualities – empathy, tolerance and understanding.

Yet, these do not fully address the underlying cause of discord between our external and internal mental states.

Spiritual texts ask us to focus within; to combat the undulating nature of the phenomenal world. They advocate Antar-mukham, inner-focus, in contrast to our habitual practice of bahar-mukham, outer focus. Spiritual intelligence points the way towards this. Intelligent quotient, IQ, is the conventional measure of one's intellectual skills, especially for young scholastic aspirants. While IQ deals with empirical analysis, observations, and outcomes, it is inadequate when confronting conflict management and human transactional challenges. Emotional intelligence, EQ, then becomes the palliative. Here the attention shifts from the individual to others – 'I' to 'you', promoting qualities of

empathy, tolerance and understanding; emphasising processes and means used in resolving challenges in inter-human transactions.

Spiritual quotient, SQ, transcends IQ and EQ and cajoles us to embark on the inner quest, identifying our source and acknowledging the essential oneness of all creation. It enables us to build awareness of the universal cosmic energy that pervades all creation. Acknowledging this gets manifested through a change in our attitude and outlook towards life. Ramana Maharshi was once asked, “How do you view others?” He replied, “There are no others.”

Many of us may take quite a while to reach this zenith of spiritual awareness, yet each one of us can steadily climb the rung of progress by developing our SQ. As we become more conscious, we will find a shift in our attitude to life. Trifles that used to bother us, no longer do. We start appreciating the larger scheme of things. We look at life as it unfolds, its beauty; designed and interconnected within a cosmic web. Importantly, it helps us shed our egoism and be humbler. We realise that while we have earned our achievements; there are many factors beyond our control which have silently and significantly helped us. These govern, for instance, where and to whom we were born, and the opportunities made available to us. We recognise the presence of more deserving individuals, whose achievement, as the world sees, is less. This awareness reduces hubris and awakens the spirit of gratitude in us.

A study by the World Happiness Report has consistently placed Finland at the top, given its high scores on income, health, freedom, and overall quality of life. Paradoxically, Finland also ranks sixth in the use of antidepressants; loneliness being a major cause. This paradox validates what spirituality teaches us. Peace and tranquillity of mind can sustain only through the inner quest.

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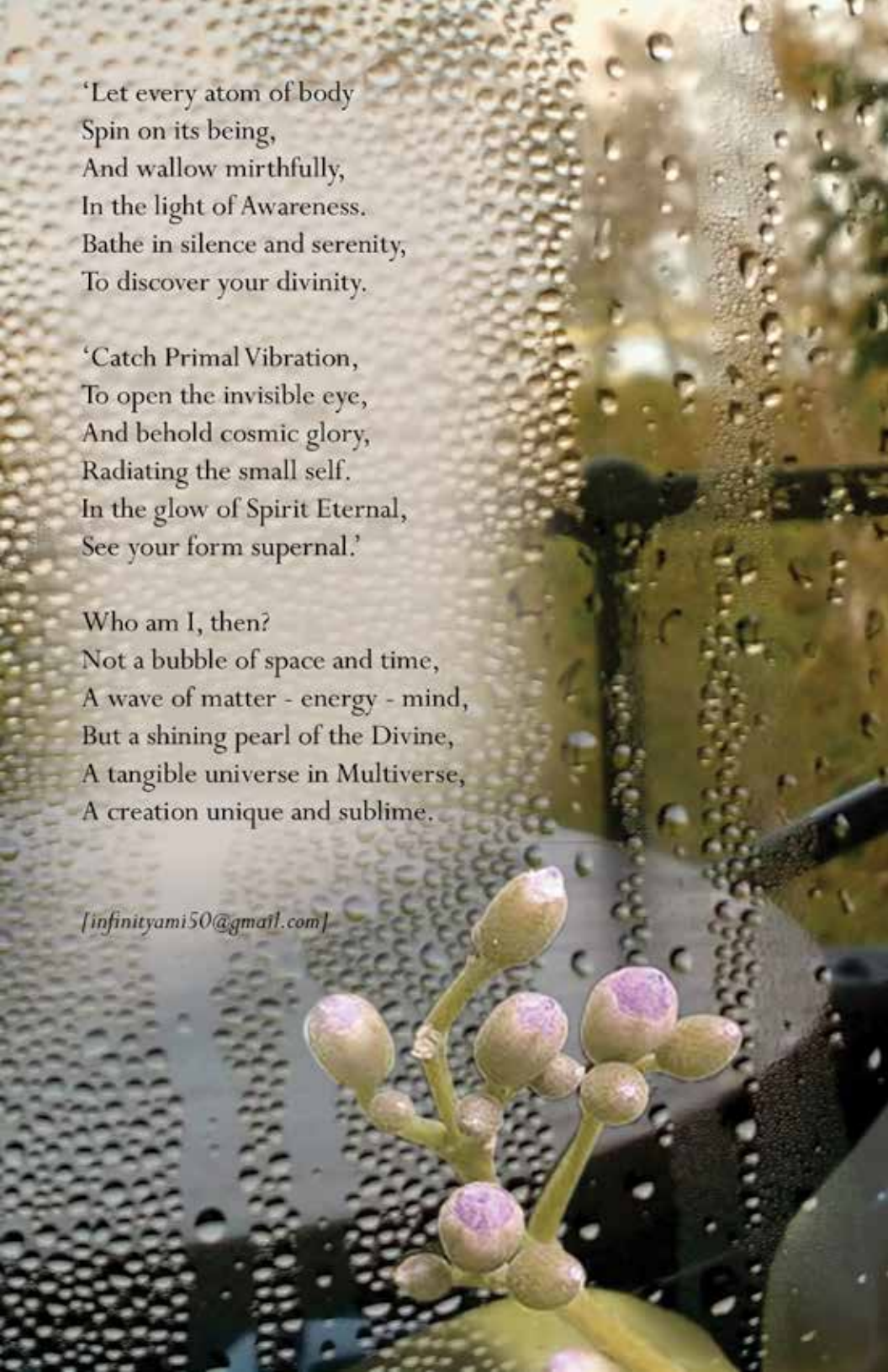
Know Thyself

Dr. Satish K. Kapoor

I wanted the world around,
To know me,
To praise me,
To follow me.
Said the Inner voice,
'First know yourself.'

The earth knows not its bounds,
Water knows not its energy,
Fire knows not its history,
Air knows not its chemistry,
Space knows not itself,
But man can know himself.

Mounts know not their majesty,
Oceans know not their depth,
Rivers know not their origin,
Forests know not their breath,
Clouds know not their destiny,
But man can know himself.
How? Inner voice spoke:
'Walk the space within,
Wearing your faith,
Using righteousness as vehicle,
Mindfulness, as fuel,
The Divine Name as guide.'



'Let every atom of body
Spin on its being,
And wallow mirthfully,
In the light of Awareness.
Bathe in silence and serenity,
To discover your divinity.

'Catch Primal Vibration,
To open the invisible eye,
And behold cosmic glory,
Radiating the small self.
In the glow of Spirit Eternal,
See your form supernal.'

Who am I, then?
Not a bubble of space and time,
A wave of matter - energy - mind,
But a shining pearl of the Divine,
A tangible universe in Multiverse,
A creation unique and sublime.

[infinityami50@gmail.com]

A Berry on the Palm of my Hand

Sharada Bhanu

It was the opening day of the academic year and Lekha walked down the corridors of her college. Her colleagues often wore a new sari to create a focus of conversation and she sometimes went along with it to avoid drawing attention to herself by difference, but today she had no need of textiles to produce a high. The familiar tingle of anticipation and fear hit her – something she always felt when about to face that unknown quantity, a new class. Not that she was very new to this any longer, she was already ten years into the profession. In staff rooms she concealed her pleasure in the task of teaching as well as she could – passion was unfashionable. But when she entered the space of the classroom and was behind her table, concealment was impossible and unnecessary. Staff members sometimes protested against the ridiculous and inappropriate title of ‘lecturer;’ Asst. Prof. would have answered their ideas of dignity better. Lekha kept her disagreement to herself – it was speaking she enjoyed.

It was the last period of the day and a value education class. It was the first time that she would be taking the freshers for this subject and she was still unsure of what she would say. The class was supposed to be learning personality development and she had tentatively considered one or two approaches at an introduction but was unsatisfied with her ideas.

“How did you start them off, Nanditha,” she had asked the previous teacher of this paper that morning.

“First day? Oh, I never teach on the first day. I just make them introduce themselves – you know how these kids take ages to come out

even with their names and schools. By the time I have taken attendance and they've finished, thankfully time's up."

Lekha knew that was how most of them started. She offered no comments but for herself, hated the procedure. While you waited for some stammering nincompoop almost sick with terror to answer, a slow murmur would rise from the back row. Then you had one of two worthless choices. You could check the rising tide every now and then or you could ignore it and be swallowed up in the noise. Moreover, the first one or two classes, in her experience were crucial in determining the relationship between teacher and students. If she risked a loss of tension, they might decide they could fool around for the rest of the term.

Lekha hated students talking to each other in her class. She believed the teacher who endured it suffered a fatal erosion of power and loss of respect. If the price she had to pay to ensure their silence was to keep speaking, she had long ago decided it was acceptable.

But today she was uneasy with the lecture she had prepared and inclined to try something else. Personality – a question of identity. Why had she never taught any class Bhagavan's teachings? In the beginning she had decided it was out of the question – her classes held students of different religions and preaching might be resented. But she felt no such qualms when she presented Taoism or Sufi thought. No, the real reason was probably that it was too close to her – Bhagavan mattered too much. This idea offered no comfort. If He mattered and His teachings were the One Reality, why did she make no effort to pass it on?

She had reached the class and with it, a decision. She would do as her colleagues did, for once. Every student would introduce herself. She would ask them to stand up and say who they were. Really.

The class was a mixed group drawn from different arts disciplines and she had no idea who belonged to it, so attendance would have to entered later. She was annoyed to note the room held no more than 15 students. There should be at least three times that number. Where were they? Of course, these girls knew nothing.

She waited a few minutes and then started.

They could each get up and say who they were. They started quite readily. Lekha reflected that they had probably been doing just that during the first four hours of the day.

A confident girl, obviously used to taking the lead, started. "I am Poorna Rajagopal from Vidyodhaya school and I took ..."

"Just a minute. You say you are Poorna Rajagopal? But is that you? Isn't that just your name?"

"Yes ma'am. But I thought you wanted us to give our names?"

"I want you to introduce yourself. To say who you are. While you are thinking that out, the girl on your right, yes you, can go on. Who are you?"

This one, plainly nervous said "I am Mythili..."

"You heard what I told Poorna? What if your parents had decided to call you something else? Would you be another person or the same?"

"The same, ma'am. I think."

"Then tell me who you really are. Yes, those of you at the door can come in. Please take your places in silence. Yes, Mythili."

"Ma'am, then shall I just say something about myself? I'm 17 years old and I play badminton..."

"Is that who you really are? A seventeen-year-old badminton player? What happens when you turn eighteen? And supposing you fracture a leg and can't play anymore. Will you be someone else?"

The girls were looking at one another nervously, as if the well-worn tables and chairs in the room had suddenly begun to dance. What had happened to the tried and trusted introduction?

A rather determined girl with a heavy build got up at the back of the room. "Ma'am we don't exactly know what you want us to say."

"Haven't I explained? Say who you really are. Really. You can think a bit and then start again. Yes, those of you hovering in the corridor can come in. Any reason why you are 15 minutes late?" If they had, they kept it to themselves.

The class began again. From a graceful girl in a headscarf, "I am five feet six inches, my parents hail from Maharashtra..."

"Okay, that's your body. What if you grow another inch? There's a boring ad on TV, for a health drink, promising parents that their

offspring will reach for the skies. Supposing it works? And supposing you had got adopted by a Punjabi couple, would you be someone else?" Lekha was enjoying herself.

"Well, I would be different."

"How?"

"I would speak Punjabi!"

The girls had got excited, suddenly. They were volunteering comments. "Well, you could learn Punjabi now. You would still be the same person. Just a Punjabi knowing Asya."

"Ma'am I'm fond of dogs. That's really me. And I lose my temper pretty frequently. That's my defect."

"Those are personality traits. But supposing you lived on an island with no dogs? Or people? Would you still have those traits? For goodness' sake, you at the door come in." This was maddening. The class was actually working up into a nice state of excitement only to have it dissipated every now and then with these interruptions. It took the whole class five minutes each time to settle down and Lekha had to explain all over again to the latecomers. Normally she would have refused admission after ten minutes but these were freshers, and they would probably wander around like this for at least a week, disoriented and timid.

A quiet, rather studious looking girl got up to say "Ma'am according to science we are determined partly by genes and partly by environment."

"Forget science. Who are you? When you relate to yourself do you say to yourself 'oh, I am gene plus enviro, that's who I am?' Do you know who you are or no?"

"Ma'am, I always thought I did, but now I think I don't."

"Ma'am, if I am not my body or name or qualities, I really don't know. You tell us, then who are we?"

"Good heavens, if you don't know who you are, how can my information be of any use? Surely you are not suffering from amnesia? Well, of course not. You have never gone around asking anyone 'who am I,' have you? It is you who have to give an answer. For those of you who have just come in, an atrocious 30 mins late, we are asking

ourselves a question – who am I. Try to answer.”

The class buzzed with excitement. Some were resentful, most bewildered, but all were thinking. Lekha tried to prevent the latecomers from entirely ruining the mood, though she was seething. “I should have done this next class,” she thought. Then dismissed it. She never wasted time. It was not in her nature to while away an hour.

And then just as she felt the question was going home and that without a single mention of Ramana’s name or any preaching at all, the most useful class she had ever taken was in progress, a girl drifted in. Obviously she did not believe in hanging about in the corridor, trying to catch a lecturer’s eye.

Lekha looked at her incredulously. “May I know how you are entering this class 40 minutes late? Or why you are bothering to put in an appearance at all? It is nearly time for the bell.”

The girl looked a little taken aback but showed no signs of dropping dead which would have been what Lekha would have liked at that moment. Moreover, she had an excuse ready. The announcement on the public address system regarding the room had been inaudible. They were all new. They didn’t know which notice board had the room numbers put up. She had had to search for this room.

Lekha tried to control her rage. “Very well, since you are finally here, perhaps you can answer a question we are all trying to cope with. Who are you, really?”

The class settled back with pleasure. They could now relax and watch this stranger go through the bewilderment and embarrassment they had faced. Fun. And much easier than answering the question.

The girl gazed at her warily. “You want me to give my name?”

“Please state who you are really are. Have you got that? The real you.”

The girl said calmly, “I am not my name or my body or my parents or my past or my country. I am not even my personality.”

The class listened in wrath and amazement. “Hey, if you’re not any of these, then who are you, huh?”

“I am me. Just me. I am. I am here. I am aware. That’s it.” The girl looked at Lekha. There was a moment of electric contact. The bell rang.

And Lekha left the class.

“It’s happened before, “she thought numbly. But how? When? Not to her, that she knew. Who was this incredible girl? “And with my usual brilliance I have forgotten to ask her name. Well, I deserved that.”

She mentioned the incident to no one. It was too humiliating. The next class she searched eagerly for the girl’s face. She wasn’t there. She asked the others. “Oh, do you mean Ranjini, ma’am. She’s left. Discontinued.”

She checked with colleagues. “That tall dark girl? She decided we were not good enough for her and has left for the US I hear. Conceited kid. Good riddance”

Lekha was disconsolate. “I should have spoken to her after the class. Told her how much I appreciated her answer.” The thought that by her irritation she might have contributed to the girl’s decision to leave, was painful.

Swami Rama. He was warned by his guru that one should never assume that everyone in an audience is at a lower level of evolution than oneself. She should have remembered that.

Sankara. He once met a child. Deaf and dumb, people thought. He wasn’t. Perhaps he had been waiting for the right question, the right moment and his Master. When Sankara had asked him the conventional “who are you” he had replied “I am Being, I am Consciousness.” Sankara had given him the name of Hasthamalaka, the one to whom the Self is as clear as a gooseberry on the palm of one’s hand and taken him as disciple.

She too had met Hasthamalaka but the berry had rolled off the palm.

Weeks passed. She could now meet the class without remembering the elusive Ranjini. And then one day she entered the classroom and as she reached automatically for her attendance register, all words died away. Who were these girls? Not Poorna, Susan, Mythili, Asya... This was Bhagavan, listening. Every one of them. And someone was now going to speak. But who was that? And as she stared at them all, there was no way she could break the silence. A murmur rose from somewhere and then like a wave it passed through the whole class. A

gasp shook Lekha and suddenly the class and she were laughing...

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Talk 364

The Nellore Professor asked about *visvarupa darsana*.

M.: *Visvatma darsana* is *visvarupa darsana* i.e., the universal Self of the cosmic Self is the cosmos. Sri Krishna started the discourse in Chapter II, saying, “I have no form”. In Chapter XI, He says, “See my form as the Universe”. Is it consistent? Again he says, “I transcend the three worlds”, but Arjuna sees the three worlds in Him. Sri Krishna says, “I cannot be seen by men, Gods, etc.”; yet Arjuna sees himself and the Gods in Him. No one could see and yet Arjuna was endowed with divine sight to see Him. Does it not look a maze of contradictions?

The answer is that the understanding is wrong. *Sthula dristi* on the physical plane is absurd. *Jnana dristi* (subtle understanding) is necessary. That is why Arjuna was given *divya chakshuh* (divine sight). Can such sight be gross? Will such interpretation lead you to a right understanding?

Sri Krishna says *Kalosmi*, ‘I am Time’. Does Time have shape? Again if the universe be His form should it not be one and unchanging? Why does He say to Arjuna, “See in me whatever you desire to see?” That means that His form is according to the desires of the seer. They speak of ‘divine sight’ and yet paint the scene, each according to his own view. There is the seer also in the seen. What is all this? Even a mesmerist can make you see strange scenes. You call this a trick, whereas the other you call divine. Why this difference? Anything seen cannot be real. That is the truth.

रश्मिरथी¹

रामधारी सिंह 'दिनकर'



मैली की राह बताने को,
सबको सुमार्ग पर लाने को,
दुर्योधन को समझाने को,
भीषण विध्वंस बचाने को,
भगवान् हस्तिनापुर आये,
पांडव का संदेशा लाये ।



‘दो न्याय अगर तो आधा दो,
पर, इसमें भी यदि बाधा हो,
तो दे दो केवल पाँच ग्राम,
रक्खो अपनी धरती तमाम ।
हम वहीं खुशी से खायेंगे,
परिजन पर असि न उठायेंगे!’

दुर्योधन वह भी दे ना सका,
आशिष समाज की ले न सका,
उलटे, हरि को बाँधने चला,
जो था असाध्य, साधने चला ।
जब नाश मनुज पर छाता है,
पहले विवेक मर जाता है ।



हरि ने भीषण हुंकार किया,
अपना स्वरूप-विस्तार किया,
डगमग-डगमग दिग्गज डोले,
भगवान् कुपित होकर बोले –
‘जंजीर बढ़ा कर साध मुझे,
हाँ, हाँ दुर्योधन! बाँध मुझे।

यह देख, गगन मुझमें लय है,
यह देख, पवन मुझमें लय है,
मुझमें विलीन झंकार सकल,
मुझमें लय है संसार सकल।
अमरत्व फूलता है मुझमें,
संहार झूलता है मुझमें।

उदयाचल मेरा दीप्त भाल,
भूमंडल वक्षस्थल विशाल,
भुज परिधि-बन्ध को घेरे हैं,
मैनाक-मेरु पग मेरे हैं।
दिपते जो ग्रह नक्षत्र निकर,
सब हैं मेरे मुख के अन्दर।

दृग हों तो दृश्य अकाण्ड देख,
मुझमें सारा ब्रह्माण्ड देख,
चर-अचर जीव, जग, क्षर-अक्षर,
नश्वर मनुष्य सुरजाति अमर।
शत कोटि सूर्य, शत कोटि चन्द्र,
शत कोटि सरित, सर, सिन्धु मन्द्र।

शत कोटि विष्णु, ब्रह्मा, महेश,
शत कोटि विष्णु जलपति, धनेश,



शत कोटि रुद्र, शत कोटि काल,
शत कोटि दण्डधर लोकपाल ।

जञ्जीर बढ़ाकर साध इन्हें,
हाँ-हाँ दुर्योधन! बाँध इन्हें ।

भूलोक, अतल, पाताल देख,
गत और अनागत काल देख,
यह देख जगत का आदि-सृजन,
यह देख, महाभारत का रण,
मृतकों से पटी हुई भू है,
पहचान, कहाँ इसमें तू है ।

अम्बर में कुन्तल-जाल देख,
पद के नीचे पाताल देख,
मुट्ठी में तीनों काल देख,
मेरा स्वरूप विकराल देख ।
सब जन्म मुझी से पाते हैं,
फिर लौट मुझी में आते हैं ।

जिह्वा से कढ़ती ज्वाल सघन,
साँसों में पाता जन्म पवन,
पड़ जाती मेरी दृष्टि जिधर,
हँसने लगती है सृष्टि उधर!
मैं जभी मूँदता हूँ लोचन,
छा जाता चारों ओर मरण ।

बाँधने मुझे तो आया है,
जंजीर बड़ी क्या लाया है?
यदि मुझे बाँधना चाहे मन,
पहले तो बाँध अनन्त गगन ।



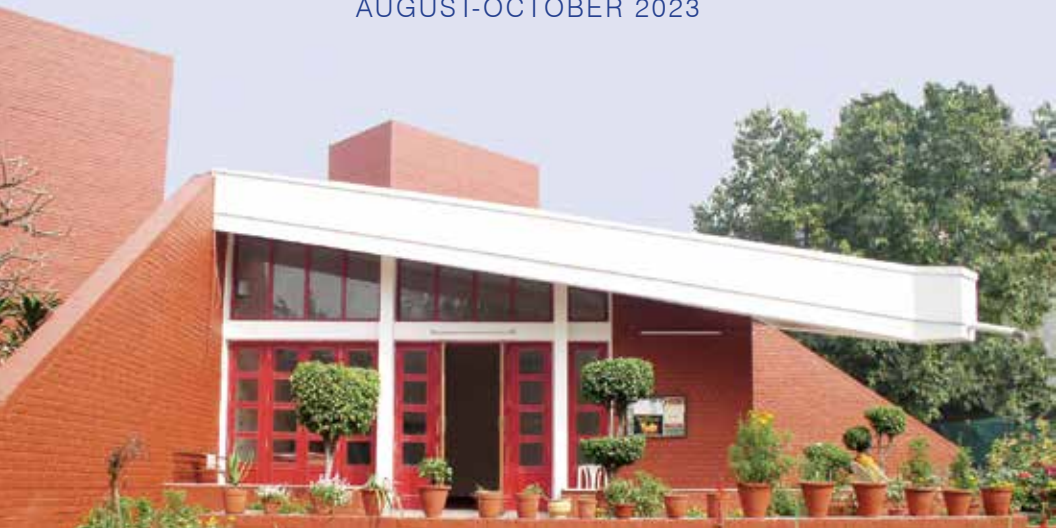
सूने को साध न सकता है,
वह मुझे बाँध कब सकता है?

हित-वचन नहीं तूने माना,
मैत्री का मूल्य न पहचाना,
तो ले, मैं भी अब जाता हूँ,
अन्तिम संकल्प सुनाता हूँ।
याचना नहीं, अब रण होगा,
जीवन-जय या कि मरण होगा।

टकरायेंगे नक्षत्र-निकर,
बरसेगी भू पर वहि प्रखर,
फण शेषनाग का डोलेगा,
विकराल काल मुँह खोलेगा।
दुर्योधन! रण ऐसा होगा।
फिर कभी नहीं जैसा होगा।

भाई पर भाई टूटेंगे,
विष-बाण बूँद-से छूटेंगे,
वायस-श्रृगाल सुख लूटेंगे,
सौभाग्य मनुज के फूटेंगे।
आखिर तू भूशायी होगा,
हिंसा का पर, दायी होगा।

थी सभा सन्न, सब लोग डरे,
चुप थे या थे बेहोश पड़े।
केवल दो नर ना अघाते थे,
धृतराष्ट्र-विदुर सुख पाते थे।
कर जोड़ खड़े प्रमुदित, निर्भय,
दोनों पुकारते थे 'जय-जय'!



20th August

Raghav ji discussed the contents of *Self-Enquiry*. He said that whenever one hears the word ‘causal body’, it seems something abstract and difficult to relate to. He advised that all one needs to do is to think of one’s own experience in deep sleep. This is when the causal body is experienced.

–AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDolplISUBI>



27th August

Michael James discussed the third verse of *Anma Viddai* and said that if we do not know what we actually are, whatever we know about anything else cannot be reliable knowledge. When we do not know the truth of the knower, how can we know the truth of whatever is known?

–AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xwama1ube8c>

10th September

Michael James continued talking about the third verse of *Anma Viddai*. He said that we all feel that we are in bondage but nothing is actually binding or holding on to us. The reason we seem to be in bondage is that we are holding on to other things such as the body.

– AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHTMzMluZ-o>



24th September

Raghav ji discussed the contents of *Self-Enquiry*. He said that we have abused the body and have made it sedentary. It was not designed to be this way. We were agrarian creatures of an agrarian society. If one was leading a traditional agrarian lifestyle, no asana practice would be required.

– AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwIcLkdj9lU>

15th October

Michael James continued talking about the third verse of *Anma Viddai*. He said that we need great love to go within. Our love is insufficient when we start the practice of self-investigation. If our love was sufficient, we would be like Bhagavan because He had sufficient love when the fear of death came to him.

– AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Qm7eflxMME>

22nd October

Raghav ji discussed the contents of *Self-Enquiry*. He said that *dhyana* happens when one repeats a thought with awareness and effort. Helpful effects take place when such thoughts are directed in a certain way

prescribed by the guru. This is different to the things which are called 'meditation' today because even visualization is termed as meditation.

– AS

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJd7Uy6TOes>

Talk 365

As Sri Bhagavan was continuing in the same strain, a visitor asked how to overcome the identity of the Self with the body.

M.: What about sleep?

D.: There is ignorance prevailing.

M.: How do you know your ignorance in sleep? Did you exist in sleep, or not?

D.: I do not know.

M.: Do you deny your existence in sleep?

D.: I must admit it by my reasoning.

M.: How do you infer your existence?

D.: By reasoning and experience.

M.: Is reasoning necessary for experience? (Laughter)

D.: Is meditation analytical or synthetic?

M.: Analysis or synthesis are in the region of intellect. The Self transcends the intellect.

Talk 447

Sri Bhagavan said that a saint Namah Sivaya who was formerly living in Arunachala must have undergone considerable difficulties. For he has sung a song saying: "God proves the devotee by means of severe ordeals. A washerman beats the cloth on a slab, not to tear it, but only to remove the dirt."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Dear Advait,

While I enjoyed reading all the articles, I particularly found the boxed excerpts from 'Talks' interesting.

Raghav Kumar Dwivedula

Dear Advait,

I particularly liked Michael Highburger and Bharati's articles. It looks easy but one can see how much has gone into the issue.

Christopher Quilkey

Dear Advait,

Good issue with professional design and aesthetics.

Prof. Vijay Vancheswar

*The results of Karma (Action) pass away,
and yet leave seeds that cast the agent
into an ocean of Karma.
Karma yields no salvation*

Ramana Maharshi {Upadesa Saram (2)}

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